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Christ Crucified,

THE CHARACTERISTICK OF APOSTOLICK PREACHING

A SERMON

DELIVERED IN THE

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF PHILADELPHIA,

AT THE OPENING OF THE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE

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BY ASHIBEL GREEN, D.D.

THE MODERATOR OF THE PRECEDING YEAR

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CHRIST CRUCIFIED,

THE CHARACTERISTICK OF APOSTOLICK PREACHING.

1 COR. i. 23—first part:

“But we preach Christ crucified—”

It appears from internal evidence that the epistle in which we find these words was written to the Corinthians by the apostle Paul, in answer to one which they had sent to him. In their letter, they had requested him to resolve certain doubts, in regard to Christian duty; and to regulate certain points of order, in their ecclesiastical concerns. On these subjects they seem to have given him distinct information. But there were other things, and things of far greater importance, of which it appears they gave him no information; and which, therefore, it is probable, they were desirous to conceal.

The truth was, that certain false teachers had crept into the church at Corinth, in the absence of the apostle, and had obtained an influence which they had used for the most pernicious purposes. They had endeavoured to persuade the Corinthians that the apostleship of Paul, if not altogether a false assumption, was at least far inferior in dignity and authority, to that of those who had been the stated companions of the Saviour in the days of his flesh. They had produced and fomented the most unhappy divisions in the church; and corruption, as usually happens, was the companion of discord. One of the members of that church, probably with the countenance of these false teachers, had been permitted, without censure, to commit and continue in a most flagitious immo-

rality. Without opposition from them, if not with their concurrence or connivance, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper had been most awfully profaned. In their publick addresses, the false philosophy, and subtle reasonings, and specious eloquence of the Sophists, had been substituted for the plain and simple enunciation of evangelical truth. By these, and by whatever other means they could devise, they had courted popularity, and laboured to destroy the influence of the inspired founder of the Corinthian church, who had gathered it from among the heathen.—His doctrines and manner of preaching, were, in many respects, in direct opposition to theirs; and unless they could subvert his authority they could not establish their own.

But although the success of these insidious men had been worthy of a better cause, it was not such but that the Corinthian Christians, when serious difficulties and embarrassments arose, resorted to their first and best friend for counsel. He, with his usual address, seized the occasion of answering their letter, not only to reply to their inquiries, but to reprove their vices, to correct their errors, to assert his full apostolick powers, and to recal them to the purity and simplicity of the gospel. Although they had not informed him, yet he tells them frankly, that it had been declared to him by those "of the house of Chloe," that there were contentions among them. He lets them know that he was apprized of their retaining in their communion an incestuous person, and of the base arts by which the minds of some of them had been alienated from himself. He addresses them, nevertheless, with the utmost tenderness and affection, commends them freely for whatever was praiseworthy among them, and takes occasion, throughout the epistle, to mingle much important doctrinal truth, and much pious sentiment, with all that he says. But he makes no compromise with their erroneous opinions and unlawful practices. He insists peremptorily, in writing, on every thing which he had taught and enjoined, when he was personally with them. It is while he is doing this that our text is introduced.—And let it be well observed, that it is in-

troduced among the very first points which the apostle sets himself to maintain. He probably gave it this precedence and prominence, because a right method of preaching, or of publickly teaching and enforcing gospel doctrine, is plainly a matter of the utmost importance in itself, and because this was one of the chief particulars in which he differed from the false teachers, with whom he was at issue.—They preached in one way, and he in another. Their manner of preaching he pointedly condemns. That of his faithful brethren and himself, he not only defends, but declares his determination inflexibly to pursue.—“ We preach Christ crucified.”

You are aware, brethren, that what the apostle here first announces, he afterwards dwells upon, with great emphasis. So soon as he had yielded a little to a tide of holy feeling, by which we often find him borne off to a short distance from his main object, he returns to the subject of our text. In the beginning of the next chapter he says, “ And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with the excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

Here, then, we have the declaration of the great apostle of the Gentiles, who certainly spake as well as wrote under the divine guidance, in regard to a system of preaching which he had adopted among the Corinthians, to the exclusion of every other: and as we have no reason to believe that he preached to them differently from what he did to others, we may say, without hesitation or reserve, that this was the system, in conformity with which he *always* preached. Must it not, then, be highly important and interesting to all, and especially to the ministers of the gospel, to ascertain distinctly what this system of preaching was? and what were the reasons which determined the apostle to adopt it, and to adhere to it with undeviating constancy? These two points I shall endeavour, in a reliance on divine aid, to illustrate, in the sequel of this discourse; and then to make a short application of the subject.

I. What was that system of preaching which the apostle declared that he had adopted, to the exclusion of every other.

In the text, he calls it the preaching of Christ crucified. Here it is manifest, that there is a reference to some one great truth, or doctrine, which formed the substance of the apostle's addresses, both publick and private.—I mention private addresses, as well as publick, because, from the circumstances in which St. Paul was placed among the heathen, much of his preaching was not addressed to large assemblies, but to families or individuals—from house to house. It should also be carefully noted, that it is plain from his declaration, that he used the contemplated doctrine, equally in the conversion of the heathen, and in the edification of Christian believers.

Now, as the naked and unconnected truth or fact, that Christ was crucified, could be of no use, especially to those who had never before heard of his name, it is too evident to require proof, that the apostle must have connected with this fact, all the information necessary to render it available to the purpose for which he announced it to them. He must have told them from the first, what necessity there was that Christ should be crucified, and what was the great design of God in the life, sufferings and death, of our blessed Redeemer. What this information actually was, we may collect from the writings left us by the apostle; and it is believed that, in a summary statement, it will be nearly this—That all mankind being, by reason of sin, in a lost and helpless state, and exposed to everlasting misery, God our heavenly Father, so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life: That Christ Jesus was this Son of God, who most willingly undertook the work of our redemption, came from heaven to earth on this most benevolent errand, assumed human nature into a personal union with his own divine nature, and thus became God and man, the fit mediator between the parties to be reconciled in the great concern of man's salvation: That the Redeemer, having taken the sinner's place as his substitute and surety, perfectly obeyed and honoured the law which

man had disobeyed and dishonoured, satisfied divine justice completely, by enduring the full penalty of the law, in a whole life of humiliation and suffering, and especially by a death of unspeakable agony and infamy—denominated *the cursed death of the cross*—and which, as a principal part of his work, is, for that reason, often put for the whole: That the Redeemer, after being laid in a tomb, rose from the dead on the third day, ascended to heaven, and to the right hand of the Father, there to appear forever as the intercessor and advocate of his people: That thence he sent down the Holy Spirit, to instruct his apostles fully in the nature of his kingdom; to enable them, without study, to speak various languages; to confer on them the power of working miracles; and to complete, without error, the canon of sacred scripture; and also, in every age, to make a saving application of the Redeemer's work to the human heart, renewing it unto holiness, and implanting and cherishing in it all the Christian graces: That for the sake of what Christ has done, God can now be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus, even though he be the chief of sinners; and that in the preaching of the gospel, he invites and commands every sinner who hears it, to come and receive a complete salvation, through this precious and all sufficient Saviour: That accordingly, whenever a sinner, under the influence of the blessed Spirit becomes sensible of his guilt and misery, and on the free offer of Christ and his benefits in the gospel, actually commits his soul by faith to the Saviour, as his sole reliance, he is pardoned and justified, and shall never come into condemnation—That by faith he is united to Christ and made one with him; the righteousness of Christ is imputed to him, or reckoned as his; the work of sanctification, by which he is prepared for heaven, is commenced in his soul; and the grace of evangelical repentance, with every other grace, being there begun, shall be cherished and carried on, in a course of sincere but imperfect obedience to all the commands of God; till at death, he shall become perfect in holiness, and rise to the enjoyment of all the bliss of heaven: That thus it shall be

with all who accept the gospel offer; while all who hear and do not accept it, shall be consigned to hopeless misery: That there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust, when the soul and body of every individual shall be reunited; and when, before the assembled universe, the Redeemer shall award to his friends eternal life, in his kingdom of glory, and to his enemies eternal punishment, with the devil and his angels.

Such, brethren, it is believed, is a statement, materially correct, of the doctrine of Christ crucified, with its *essential appendages*. It is, indeed, by no means pretended, that this statement is so accurate as to preclude all amendment; or that it may not admit of some modifications, without destroying its essence. But it is maintained, that if this was not the *substance* of what the apostle intended, when he said “We preach Christ crucified,” it will not be practicable to show, in any just or even plausible manner, what he did intend. Much of the subsequent part of this epistle, and much indeed of all his epistles, demonstrates that we have fairly represented the scope and spirit of his meaning in the text.

As to the apostle’s determination to know, or preach, *nothing else*, than the doctrine of a crucified Saviour, it may be remarked, that judging of what he delivered orally, by what we find in his writings, he certainly did not confine himself to the dry and incessant reiteration of the truths we have detailed. On the contrary, we find him expressly affirming, that he had not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God; and there is actually apparent in his writings, a whole system of theological truth, and of evangelical ethics, extensively taught and powerfully inculcated. But that all this is perfectly consistent with what we have given as the import of the text, may be shown by an illustration, taken from the words of our Saviour himself. He told the Jews, that on two commandments, relating to the great principle of love—love to God and love to man—hang *all the law and the prophets*. In like manner, we affirm, that although the apostle declared many truths, taught many doctrines, and

urged many duties, he still knew *nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified*, because every thing was made by him to hang upon the cross. The truths which we have recited, were so much and so often insisted on, that they formed a large and the most prominent part of his system, and thus gave to it its distinctive character and appellation. *All* his teaching, moreover, whatever was the subject or the occasion, *savoured* strongly of the cross; it always had a manifest consistency, and generally a plain connexion, with the doctrine of Christ crucified—From this doctrine it was often immediately derived; frequently it was little else than the ramification, or carrying out, of this doctrine, into its proper consequences; and not seldom, the teaching and illustration of some *related truth*, serving to give it clearness and effect. In a word, the doctrine of Christ crucified, was the *sun* of the apostle's theological system, which imparted lustre to every other truth, directed its course, and kept it to its proper orbit—The sun which threw off its beams of heavenly radiance in all directions, to warm, and cheer, and animate those who were already spiritually alive, and to waken into life, those who were yet slumbering in the frost and death of sin; which gave vitality and productive energy to every evangelical principle and precept; and to which every ray of truth might be traced back, as to its proper source; and to whose full orb'd splendour every Christian eye was often directed, to catch some glimpses of a glory too intense for a full and steady vision, till mortality should be swallowed up of life.

Let us now inquire—

II. What were the reasons which determined the apostle to adopt, and inflexibly to adhere to, the system of publick teaching, which has been explained—to the preaching of Christ crucified.

There were two reasons for this, which we may collect from the writings of our apostle; and it will appear that they were entirely sufficient to justify the determination he had formed, and to justify the same determination, in every mi-

nister of Christ, to the end of the world. In the first place—The apostle knew that it was the purpose of God to *bless* the preaching of Christ crucified, and ordinarily to bless no other kind of preaching than this, both for the conversion of sinners and the edification of saints. This reason is distinctly assigned, and the explanation of it pretty largely stated, in immediate connexion with the text. “Christ,” says the apostle, “sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with the wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God. For it is written—I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified; unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness. But unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” No laboured exposition is necessary, to show the direct and decisive bearing of this extended quotation on the point before us. The apostle reminds the Corinthians that the experiment had been fully tried, as to what the wisdom of this world could effect, in teaching the knowledge of God, and in the reformation of mankind. For four thousand years the experiment had been continued, and after all, the world by its boasted wisdom knew not God; but was sunk in the most sottish idolatry, the most degrading vice, and the most horrible wickedness. This had been permitted, in the wisdom and just judgment of God, that contempt might be poured on the proud devices of men; and to prepare the way for the device of God, to instruct and convert the world by the

foolishness of preaching—that preaching of a crucified Saviour which the learned and philosophick Greek derided as foolishness, and which the proud and prejudiced Jew found to be a stumbling block, because it was death to all his hopes of a splendid conquering Messiah, who should raise his nation to supreme worldly dominion. Still, however, the preaching of Christ crucified had been proved, by undeniable facts, to be the power and the wisdom of God, unto the salvation of multitudes. The doctrine of the cross, unaided by philosophical reasonings, and unadorned by a specious eloquence, but in full opposition to both, had done more in a few years, to enlighten and convert the world, than had been done before, by all the wit of man, from the beginning of time till that hour. Thus the foolishness of God—that plan of his which vain mortals had esteemed foolishness—had been proved to be wiser than men, with all their boasted sagacity and refinement: And the weakness of God—the system which they charged with weakness—to be stronger than men:—unspeakably more powerful in turning men to righteousness, than all the fancied force of reason and argument, on which they relied. God, therefore, had set his seal on this system as his own—As such he had blessed it, and would bless it. But as for any different or opposite system, it was of course the *rival* of his, and therefore he had not, and ordinarily would not, use it in his service nor confer on it any blessing.

The sense here given, brethren, of the passage quoted, is coincident with that which may be found in all the best commentators who have ever expounded it; nor can any other be given, which shall not manifestly appear to be harsh and forced in the extreme.

The reason we are considering, consists, you observe, of two parts.—The first is, that it is God's purpose to bless the doctrine or preaching of the cross.—The second, that he ordinarily blesses nothing else. We shall dispose of the latter part first, and in a very few words.

We say that God *ordinarily* blesses no other preaching than that of Christ crucified, because we ought to admit and

remember, that as the author of our text was converted while on his way to persecute the Christians at Damascus, so there have been a few examples in every age, of men who have been met with, and brought to the saving knowledge of the truth, in circumstances, and by means, of the most unpromising character. All such instances are striking exceptions to God's ordinary method of dispensing his grace. They are intended to exhibit the divine sovereignty, and to demonstrate that although he usually employs well adapted means, he can work without them, and even in opposition to those which he ordinarily uses. The instances of the kind contemplated, are exceedingly rare, and by being so, evidently appear to be exceptions to a general rule, and serve, not to invalidate, but to confirm it.

Having shown the nature of this exception, I remark, that the position we maintain—that it is the preaching of Christ crucified, and that only, which God ordinarily blesses—is firmly established by a series of striking and undeniable facts, in every age of the Christian church. Did our limits permit, it would be a pleasing employment to take a general survey of these facts. But we have time only to glance at a few. Others will doubtless occur to many in whose presence I now speak.

First of all, let us turn our attention for a few moments to the apostolick age. Of all the apostles, Paul laboured most, and with the most success. Now we have seen what was exclusively the method of preaching adopted by him, and his immediate associates—"We preach Christ crucified." All the churches, then, which he gathered from among the heathen, were composed of converts, made and edified by the preaching of the cross. Nor have we the least reason to believe, that the preaching of the other apostles was different from that of Paul. They were all taught and guided by one and the same Spirit, and doubtless pursued the same method of spreading the gospel. Beside, the short notices of their manner of discourse, left us in the Acts, demonstrate that such was indeed the fact. Peter's sermon on the day of Pen-

tecost, his testimony, as the mouth of the whole apostolick college, before the Jewish Sanhedrim, and especially his discourse to Cornelius, and those that were assembled with him, show clearly that it was Jesus Christ and him crucified, that was the burden of his powerful and wonder working addresses. We may therefore affirm with confidence, that it was the preaching of Christ crucified, by the instrumentality of which the whole primitive church was formed, edified, and established in the world. There was philosophical, and rhetorical, and legal, and logical preaching then, to the utter exclusion or complete disguise of the doctrine of the cross, as there has been in every succeeding age. It was exactly this which was employed by the false teachers in the Corinthian church. And what were its effects? They were noticed, in part, at the entrance of this discourse. They were such as they have commonly been since—formality, self-exaltation, claims to superior knowledge and sagacity, controversy, corruption, immorality, profaning sacred institutions, and alienation from apostolick truth and apostolick men. It probably was never made instrumental to gain a single convert to genuine Christianity, for our apostle solemnly warns Timothy to avoid and oppose it altogether.

Look now to the Protestant reformation. And here, if we inquire why reformation was necessary—the answer will be, that although there were things innumerable that called for it, yet, in the opinion of the great reformer himself, no *single* thing demanded it so loudly and imperiously, as this, that the doctrine of justification with God, solely by the merits and righteousness of Christ, had been buried and lost amidst the corruptions and superstition of antichristian Rome. Yet, as fable sometimes indicates that its origin was truth, so, in the very superstition of popery, we find evidence that the doctrine of which I speak was the doctrine of the apostolick age. Had not the doctrine of the cross been prominent in the faith of the primitive church, and much insisted on by her publick teachers, the superstitious notions which afterwards obtained in regard to the cross, had probably never existed.

It was in place of the sacred doctrine of Christ crucified, that corrupt superstition and will worship substituted images of the cross, the worship of the cross, the sign of the cross, and veneration for pretended relicks of the cross. To banish the superstition, and to restore the genuine doctrine, was, by his own statement, the most important part of the work of Luther. Justification by the righteousness of Christ, imputed to us and received by faith alone, you know, he declared to be the article of a standing or a falling church. This was the theme on which he dwelt with the greatest earnestness and frequency. He has embodied his sentiments and arguments, in his practical commentary on the epistle of Paul to the Galatians, made up of a series of publick, popular discourses, which he delivered at Wittemburg. Never have I read an uninspired book in which the very kind of preaching which we now contemplate, is more clearly exhibited—strongly marked, indeed, with the peculiarities—some of them exceptionable peculiarities—of the age and author of the work.

And in the same strain, with little variation, did all the reformers preach. You know the effect. Apostolick preaching was crowned with apostolick success. While thus they preached and wrote, converts were multiplied like drops of the morning dew. The reformation, like a mighty torrent, carried all before it. And how was it at last arrested, and brought to a stand? Not so much by the violent opposition of its adversaries, as by the errors and misdirected zeal of its friends. They turned the force of their minds and the vigour of their efforts, from the defence and propagation of essential gospel truth, to wordy and angry controversy, relative to points, which probably none of them considered as essential. With these controversies, the minds both of teachers and learners became engrossed, parties were formed and embittered, and vital piety wounded in the house of its friends, languished, till its progress was almost entirely stayed; and the peaceful Melancthon panted for the heavenly rest, that he might escape forever from the disputes of angry theologians.

Leaving the Protestant reformation, if we examine the ori-

gin, and instrumental cause, of every genuine and extensive revival of religion since, I grievously err, if it will not appear, that plain gospel preaching—the preaching of Christ crucified—was manifestly blessed of God, both for commending and carrying forward his own work of grace. Disputes about unessential points, and forms of religion, visionary extravagance, and corrupt doctrine, taking place of sober evangelical truth, will be found to have been the usual causes of the declension and termination of these revivals.

Next consider the effects of different kinds of preaching, in particular congregations, and with individual ministers. The distinguished Chalmers, has himself told us, that he preached, with all his skill, but without the doctrine of the cross, for more than twelve years; and that he neither made a convert, nor produced a reformation of manners. Since he has preached evangelically, the success that has attended his various labours, has been great and extensive. It has been precisely the same with others. Whatever has been the accuracy of their reasoning, the profundity of their speculations, the eloquence of their sermons, or even the purity of moral conduct which they have recommended, if Christ crucified has not been their frequent and animating theme, nothing better has usually been seen in their congregations than decency of deportment, and some regard to the exterior of religion—the form of godliness without its power. Often, indeed, even this has been wanting; and in its place dissipation and profligacy have been notoriously prevalent. On the contrary, the congregation shall rarely if ever be found, in which evangelical truth has been ably, faithfully, and perseveringly preached, without being visibly blessed—often to a marked revival of vital piety; nearly always, to its preservation and increase.

Let us next consult the modern missionaries to the heathen. And here, would your time and my strength permit, I should quote to you largely from the journal of our own Brainard. If he had written with a view to favour my present design, he could not have written more to the purpose. Take the

following short specimens, which would be rendered far more impressive, if I could give you the context of the passages which I shall repeat. "I can't but take notice," says Brainard, "that I have, in the general, ever since my first coming among these Indians in New Jersey, been favoured with that assistance, which to me is uncommon, in preaching *Christ crucified*, and making him the *centre* and *mark* to which all my discourses among them were directed.—And never did I find so much freedom and assistance, in making all the various lines of my discourses meet together, and *centre in Christ*, as I have frequently done among these Indians.—I don't mention these things as a recommendation of my own performances; for I'm sure I found, from time to time, that I had no skill or wisdom for my great work; and knew not how to choose out acceptable words, proper to address poor benighted Pagans with! But thus God was pleased to help me "not to know any thing among them, save Jesus Christ and him crucified." Thus I was enabled to show them their misery and undoneness without him, and to represent his complete fitness to redeem and save them. And *this* was the preaching God made use of, for the awakening of sinners, and the propagation of this work of grace among the Indians.—And 'twas remarkable, from time to time, that when I was favoured with any special freedom in discoursing of *the ability and willingness of Christ to save sinners, and the need they stood in of such a Saviour*, there was then the greatest appearance of divine power, in awakening numbers of secure souls, promoting conviction begun, and comforting the distressed."

Such is the testimony, with much of the same import, of the humble, holy, apostolick Brainard.

And in perfect conformity with this, is the testimony given by the missionaries of the Moravians, or United Brethren, of their success among the Esquimaux Indians. Their account of it is generally known, and is very summarily this.—After endeavouring, for a length of time, to indoctrinate their pagan charge, in the knowledge of God, as the Creator, preserver.

and judge of the world, and by this knowledge to rouse the attention and alarm the fears of the Indians, and prepare them for evangelical truth, they found that they had produced no practical effect whatever; and could scarcely, indeed, gain the attention of their wretched hearers. As a last effort, they directed them at once to “the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world.”—They told them of the Son of God, coming from heaven to earth, to suffer, bleed, and die on the cross, to save them from eternal perdition. This was the truth that God blessed. The hearts of the Esquimaux, cold before to the messages of grace as the polar snows with which they were surrounded, melted rapidly under these rays from the sun of righteousness. They prostrated themselves at the foot of a dying Saviour’s cross, and cried “Lord Jesus, save us, or we perish forever—” Having mentioned the United Brethren and their missionaries, I cannot forbear to remark, that they have always been distinguished as a Christian sect, for their constant and abundant reference to the Saviour and his cross. And where can we find more self denial, more gospel simplicity, and greater zeal to promote the cause of the Redeemer, than have appeared among these excellent people—the pioneers and examples of modern missionaries?

But among the most cultivated, as well as among the most savage, the doctrine of the cross has been pre-eminently blessed. Infidels who had long held out against the most acute and learned reasonings, and even boasted of their triumphs in the field of argument, have sometimes, on hearing a plain, practical, gospel sermon, or a private exhibition of gospel truth, been pricked to the heart, humbled in the dust at the feet of that Saviour whom they had before blasphemed, and found redemption and consolation through that precious blood, which once they had impiously trampled under their feet.

As to practical Christians, fully indoctrinated in the truths of the gospel—no matter how dissimilar their circumstances and character—the most erudite as well as the most unlettered

ed, the old and the young, male and female, bond and free—they may all be appealed to with confidence, to decide on the point before us, as a matter of experience with themselves. Ask them, what is the preaching that is most blessed to their souls? What most tends to banish their gloom, to nourish their faith, to encourage their hopes, to dispel their fears? What soonest and most completely dissolves their whole souls into a sweet flow of holy gratitude and love? What fills them with the greatest hatred of all sin, and the strongest desires after an entire deliverance from its thraldom? What animates them most in all duty? What engages them to labour most earnestly and cheerfully for the salvation of others? What disposes them most unreservedly and sincerely to devote all that they have and are to the service and glory of God their Saviour? With one consent they will answer, in the language of the author of our text—“The love of Christ constraineth us;” and they will assign the apostle’s reason too:—“For we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead, and that he died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them and rose again—” With entire unanimity they will testify, that in general those sermons edify, and delight, and animate them the most, in which are set forth in a truly scriptural manner, the all sufficiency and wonderful suitableness of Christ; his dying love; his finished righteousness; his prevalent intercession; his faithfulness to his promises; his perfect example; his sympathy with all his members; the glory of God, as it shines in the union and display of all the divine attributes in the astonishing plan of man’s redemption; and the beatifick vision of this glory, which his redeemed people shall soon possess, in the immediate presence of their ascended Saviour, and which shall be as lasting as eternity.

But especially, if you observe the believer in the near prospect of death, you shall then find that a crucified Saviour is his all in all. I do not say that all real believers triumph in death. But assuredly many do; and all would, if they

could see their state to be what it actually is.—Probably the following language is, in substance, that which a number present have in fact heard—certainly it is such as at least one has heard—from an eminent Christian, when entering the dark valley—“All my hope is in the finished righteousness of my dear, my adored Redeemer. But *there* my hope is strong; it is my anchor within the vail. True it is, I never did see myself to be more polluted and undeserving as a sinner, than I now see myself. But I see such an infinite fulness in Christ, and such a freeness in the offer of all the benefits of his purchase, and I feel such a delight and confidence in trusting my soul with him—simply on his word and warrant, and such an ardent desire to be eternally set free from all sin, and be made perfectly holy in his blissful presence, that I know I am accepted. Yes, most unworthy as I am, ‘I know in whom I have believed, and that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.’ Therefore, welcome, thrice welcome, death! ‘O death, where is thy sting! O grave, where is thy victory! The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law, but thanks be to God, who giveth me the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.’”

Thus, brethren, I think it clearly appears, from undeniable facts, that God blesses the preaching of Christ crucified, both for the conversion of sinners and the edification of saints; and that he ordinarily blesses nothing else. Now, of this no man that ever lived was more sensible than the apostle Paul; and hence the inflexible purpose which he formed, that this exclusively should be the matter of his preaching. He surely needed nothing more than this, to bear him out in the determination which he avowed. For if we know that any appointment is of God, although we cannot discern the wisdom of it, yet we certainly know that it must be wise, because it comes from the infinite source both of wisdom and goodness; and therefore it becomes our duty to conform to it promptly and cheerfully. Some of the divine appointments have partaken in a degree of this obscure character.

But to those who love the truth, there is no obscurity whatever in this appointment. On the contrary, its wisdom is most apparent; and doubtless it was seen to be so by the apostle: for,

2d. It may be shown, that every doctrine and duty of true religion may be best illustrated, and most powerfully enforced, by a reference to a crucified Saviour.* To do justice to this position, would require a whole discourse, in place of a small part of one, which is already trespassing on ordinary bounds. We can only advert, in the most cursory manner, to a few leading points of practical Christianity, and show, in a sentence or two, the illustration and enforcement they may receive from the doctrine of Christ crucified.

Human depravity, the evil of sin, God's hatred of it, and his unchangeable determination that it shall never go unpunished, are truths which lie at the foundation of all genuine piety; and all these truths may be most clearly and impressively taught from the cross of Christ. How deeply must that moral being be polluted and depraved, who can never be cleansed, till he is washed in the blood of the Son of God; and never become holy, till he is created anew by the Holy Ghost! And what must be the extent and malignity of that evil, which could not be expiated, so as to render its pardon consistent with the justice of the Deity, but by the inconceivable agonies of Gethsemane, and the accursed death of Calvary—of Him who was Emmanuel, God with us! And how must God hate all sin, and never fail to punish it in the most awful manner, when he would make no abatement in the sufferings of a sinless Saviour—his well-beloved Son—when he only stood, and in boundless compassion too, in the sinner's place! "If these things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry!" Look to the cross of Christ, rather than to the flames of Tophet, if you would have the most impressive view that you can ever take of the evil of sin, of God's abhorrence of it, and of the certainty and severity of its punishment.

But "God is love."—It is essential that he be so represented,

* When this discourse was delivered, the most of the illustration under this particular was omitted.

at the same time that he is exhibited as inflexibly just. And “herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins—God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us—what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God!” The love, grace, mercy, and compassion of God, can never be shown in any other way, that will, for a moment, bear a comparison with the exhibition made of them in the gift, mission, and sufferings of Christ;—made that guilty rebels might be pardoned, reconciled to himself, become his adopted children, made heirs of God, and joint heirs with his own beloved Son, of “an inheritance, incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.”

It is also essential to a just system of religion, that the divine attributes be exhibited as harmonious; and the glory of God as secured and illustrated, in all that he is represented as having done. Without this, no rightly disposed mind could ever be satisfied, even if complete provision were made for its own safety. Now, in the cross of Christ, all the divine attributes are perfectly harmonized. Here it is, and only here, that “mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” By the cross, every attribute of the Deity is shown immaculate, and beaming with a splendour no where else to be seen. The highest display of the glory of God ever made to the universe, was made by the cross of Christ. This glory is here seen, not only to be consistent with the salvation of penitent offenders, but to shine the brightest of all, in the *very act* of saving *the chief of sinners*—“Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.”

Guilt is ever suspicious and fearful. Hence the numerous, and often cruel rites of all false religions, to appease an incensed Deity. But to the gospel penitent, the strongest and most satisfactory evidence is given, of certain pardon and acceptance with God, in the doctrine of a crucified Saviour. Divine justice is perfectly satisfied in the cross of Christ, and

unites with mercy, in assuring the believing penitent that he shall never come into condemnation. Here it is, that “God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.” United by faith to the Son of God, as the branch is united to the vine—identified with Jesus—the believer can no more come into condemnation, than the Saviour himself. “Because I live, ye shall live also,” is his cheering assurance to all his true disciples.

Again. It is of the utmost importance in religion, that the most powerful motives should be constantly presented to the mind, to avoid all sin, and to discharge all known duty. And where shall we find motives so admirably adapted to this purpose, as we derive from the doctrine of Christ crucified? Can the believer think of the evil of sin, as seen in the cross, and not hate it, loathe it, and flee from it? Can he endure the thought of being in league with the murderers of his adored Lord, and of crucifying him afresh? Must he not fear sin worse than death? And can he refuse any grateful return—for gratitude is the only return he can make—to the Saviour who redeemed him with his own blood? Is there any service, or any sacrifice, that his heart will permit him to withhold from such a Saviour? Is there any thing, by which the religion of this Saviour can be either adorned or promoted, that he will not rejoice to do? Here, in fact, are the very motives which, from the time of Paul to the present hour, have rendered real evangelical Christians, the most conscientious, holy, and devoted, of mankind.

Once more. Every sensible sinner, and every real believer, has a clear and affecting perception of his own weakness, frailty, and proneness to sin; and full well he knows that the enemies of his soul, both within him and without him, are numerous, subtle, and powerful. He sees that, left to himself, he must certainly faint and fail, and might therefore despair at once. But he is taught by the doctrine of Christ crucified, that he will never be left to himself. His once crucified Saviour—“his great high priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God,” will help him to “hold

fast his profession." His glorified Saviour is made head over all things to the church which is his body. He controls, and will ever control, all the enemies of his people. He sympathises with them, too, in all their trials; and through his strengthening them, "they can do all things." While he intercedes for them above, his Spirit intercedes in their hearts, assists their prayers, helps their infirmities, carries on his own work of sanctification, and will carry it on, till they shall be brought off conquerors and more than conquerors, and grace shall be completed in glory.

Finally. Heavenly happiness, exquisite and eternal, seems a reward altogether disproportionate to the attainments and services of the best saint that ever lived on earth;—and nothing that is incongruous will ever be awarded by a perfect God. But this incongruity is all removed, by the doctrine of a crucified Saviour. Heavenly happiness is represented by our apostle as "a purchased possession." It comes to the believer in the form of an inheritance, from his kinsman Redeemer. Between his infinite merits and the happiness of heaven, there is no disproportion, no incongruity. And the reward of the saints, freely bestowed on all, will be apportioned to each according to the measure of his love and his labours. The believer, therefore, rationally and confidently expects to receive his reward, as a gratuitous legacy, from his infinitely meritorious Saviour; and while his heart overflows with gratitude for the unspeakable gift, he anticipates the happy moment, when, in some humble place in heaven, he will begin the eternal song of praise—"Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

From the sketch now given, very imperfect as it is, it may be seen, that, according to the declaration of the apostle in the context, the doctrine of the cross is not only the *power* of God, but the *wisdom* of God:—is not only the doctrine to which alone he ordinarily gives efficiency, by the power of his Spirit; but the doctrine also in which the divine wisdom

is most wonderfully manifested, in adapting it to all the circumstances of sinful men; to all the principles and powers of their intellectual and moral nature. In using this doctrine to convert the world—to bring sinners to repentance and to edify and comfort saints—the wisdom of God is most apparent *in choosing an instrument*—an instrument, which, while it is one exactly of which Jews and Greeks, and the children of proud carnal wisdom in every age, never did, and never will see the *fitness*, is nevertheless fitted, in the most *perfect manner*, to perform the work to which it is destined, —“The foolishness of God is wiser than men.”

Fathers and Brethren in the Christian Ministry:

How unspeakably momentous to us, is the subject that has now been under discussion? Does God bless the preaching of Christ crucified, and ordinarily bless no other kind of preaching? Then, with what solemnity and energy, should the inquiry come home to every one of us—is this the character of *my* preaching? Ah! it is fearful beyond expression, to speak as a minister and ambassador of Christ, and yet to deliver something which he will never own as his message, or follow with his blessing. O! let us ever keep in mind, that we must, in our humble measure, preach *like* Paul, if we expect to meet with any portion of Paul’s success.

In preaching, as in every thing else, there may doubtless be different degrees of excellence; a greater or a less degree of conformity to the apostolick example: and God may, and often does, bless his own truth, even when it is mixed with much human error and imperfection. Gold which is mingled with much alloy is still gold, and of real worth. Yet as the value of the metal is greatest when it has no alloy, so evangelical truth is the most precious and useful, when its purity reaches completely the gospel standard. It may therefore be of some use just to mention, both how unqualified counterfeits may be put in its place, and how, when something of it is retained, its worth may be greatly diminished by debasing mixtures.

It is manifest, at once, that those who deny the proper divinity and atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ, never can preach the doctrine of a crucified Saviour, as it was preached by Paul. The cross of the Redeemer, indeed, seems to be a real incumbrance to their whole system; rendering its defence far more difficult than it would be, if he had not expired on a cross, with its attendant sufferings. Their discourses, of consequence, are found to be as different from those of Paul, as if they had been designed to be so. But even those who explicitly admit the divinity of the Saviour, and that, in some sense, he made an atonement for sin, may still have nothing in their preaching of the doctrine of Christ crucified, as it was held and taught by the apostle. In this class—which is indeed a very large one—all those are included, who keep out of their pulpit addresses all the *peculiar doctrines* of the gospel; or only advert to them slightly, or occasionally; as if on purpose to show, that while they do not deny them, they think them of little importance.—All your merely metaphysical, logical, rhetorical, moral, and philosophical preaching, in which the name of Jesus Christ is seldom heard, and the doctrine of the cross is never clearly set forth, is of this description. And even when the peculiar doctrines of the gospel are made the subjects of discussion, if they are treated wholly in a dry or abstract way, without close and practical application, and with no animating reference to the cross, there can be very little of the manner of Paul in such pulpit performances. Nor can any thing better be said of those representations of something called an *atonement*, to which Paul's language in describing it cannot fairly be applied;—cannot be accommodated, without construing the apostle's expressions in a most unnatural and unwarrantable manner. Neither do they preach Christ crucified as Paul did, who fill a whole discourse with legal terror; with scarcely a word to direct the alarmed sinner to the Saviour. Paul did indeed preach “the terrors of the Lord,” and we ought to preach them, and faithfully too: but always as the apostle did—that we may “persuade men”—persuade them to flee to the Saviour, while his arms are

open to receive them. There may also be, in those who really hold the truth in its purity, such a want of plain language and simplicity of manner in stating it, as to hide much of its excellency from the unlearned, and greatly to abate its power and sweetness with all who love it. There may likewise be a deficiency in the frequency with which the doctrines of the cross are directly and distinctly treated, in a course of preaching; and a deficiency, finally, in making every thing, as holy Brainard well expresses it, "meet together and centre in Christ."

Beloved brethren—Let it be understood, that, on the one hand, I solemnly disclaim all personal allusions in any thing I have said; and on the other, that I desire not to abate or soften any censure which a declaration of the truth may inflict. Let the truth do its office fairly with the consciences of us all. We may all profit by being warned of the errors that have been specified; and if any of us are conscious of having committed them, let us amend them without delay. Every one of us has continually reason to be on his guard, not to depart, in his preaching, from "the simplicity that is in Christ."

As society advances in what is called *refinement*, there is always an increase of danger, that the plain truths of the gospel will be refined away; or in a measure kept back or disguised, by those whose sacred office it is to proclaim them faithfully. Of this danger the whole history of the church hitherto, gives us solemn warning. And as learning, and taste, and elegance, and wealth, and luxury, are making progress in our country, who shall say that they will not disadvantageously affect the preaching of the gospel among us, as they have done among others? Who can say and prove, that this effect has not already been experienced, in some portions of our country? Who can affirm that nothing of the kind has yet been indicated in our own church? That with us it has not made great progress, I sincerely believe, and rejoice to say. But it is an evil, against which we should constantly both watch and pray; for Luther's maxim is unquestionably just, that the doctrine we have been considering, is the

doctrine of a standing or a falling church. Of the happy part of this alternative we are now the living witnesses. To the blessing of God on the plain and faithful preaching of the doctrines of the cross, the Presbyterian church in the United States must attribute her remarkable prosperity and increase; —the numerous happy revivals of religion which she has witnessed, the unexampled multiplication of her congregations, and presbyteries, and synods, and the enlargement of her boundaries in all directions. And beyond a peradventure, she will continue to increase and prosper, so long as these doctrines, in their purity and simplicity, shall be loved, and taught, and inculcated. But let these doctrines be corrupted, or become unfashionable; let them even be disguised, or mutilated, or philosophised into obscurity, and the King of Zion will inscribe “*ICHABOD*” on our church—her glory will have departed, and her prosperity will terminate. Yes, and in this event it will be desirable that it should terminate; for the salvation of souls is of infinitely more importance than the prevalence of any religious sect, by whatever name it may be called. Wherefore, I repeat, let us use all the means in our power, to guard against the corruption or neglect of the genuine evangelical doctrines, and to cherish the preaching of them plainly, fully, abundantly, closely, and zealously—That to this end I might contribute my mite, the subject of this address was selected. Being “such an one,” as an aged minister of the gospel, I determined to lay before my brethren on this publick occasion, my views of the manner in which the gospel ought to be exhibited and inculcated by those who preach it. This I have endeavoured to do, as in the *near* prospect of my last account; for to *me* the hour for rendering that account *must* be near. And from none of us, brethren, can it be far distant—To some, it is probably just at hand. Several of our ministerial brethren, who met in this house at the last General Assembly are now in eternity. The past year has been marked by the death of more ministers in our communion—some in the prime of life, and others in the meridian of their usefulness—than any other year within my memory. Some

of us, it is highly probable, have entered on the last year of our ministry and our life. And O, brethren! it must be the doctrine of Christ crucified that must afford us support, if we find a stable support, in the hour of death; and ensure our acquittal, if we find an acquittal, at the bar of our final Judge. —This precious doctrine, therefore, let us embrace cordially, maintain firmly, and preach, while we may, with fidelity and zeal.

Christian brethren, who are not in the gospel ministry: Be exhorted, in one word, to look well, that it is *on Christ alone*, that you are resting your hopes for eternity; and that you are walking worthily of the high vocation wherewith ye are called.

A crucified Saviour has, I know, been faithfully preached to the most of those who now hear me. And it is a most affecting thought, that any who have, to this hour, held out against the Saviour, have done it in opposition to the most effectual means that God has ever devised, to convert sinners, and to reconcile them to himself. Justly may they fear, if their impenitence longer continue, that he may swear in his wrath, that they shall not enter into his rest. Behold, then, O impenitent sinners! one free offer of the Saviour more is now made you; and I entreat you, by all that is dear and sacred, refuse it not, lest it should prove the last. “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation! To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” Amen.







